

Unschooling and Anarchism

Idzie Desmarais

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I don't really separate the different aspects of my life: every belief, opinion, and interaction is intertwined with all other parts of who I am and how I live. So although I might not talk about it specifically all that often on this blog, my anarchist views—my belief that humans have the innate ability to control their own lives and as such do not need to be, and are happier without being, ruled—infuse everything that I write and think, including what I write and think about unschooling.

I find it interesting that my becoming anarchist went hand-in-hand with my embracing of unschooling. Coming out of a not-so-great time in my early to mid teenage years, a time characterized by feelings of depression, of feeling like an outcast, and of not knowing who I was as a person or what I should be doing, I started reading extensively about both unschooling and anarchism. And, not long after I decided, with both relief and a new found conviction, that unschooling really had been the right thing for me, and really was an amazing way of looking at and living Education, I finally found a political view that truly spoke to me, that felt right in the most fundamental way.

For me, the questioning of the education system—something so close to the hearts of so many people, something almost universally heralded as an amazing achievement for a democratic country, and the best way to Get An Education—and the realization that it was not only not the best option, but something truly horrible to inflict on the vast majority of youth, really startled me, and led me to start questioning all the other rarely examined or thought about aspects of society. That questioning, starting with unschooling, was a process that led me very organically to rethinking almost every aspect of life and how we live in this world. It was pretty mind-blowing. So as you can see, for me unschooling and anarchy have always been tied especially closely together!

Radical unschooling is a philosophy that recognizes that children are people, too, and as thus have a right to control their own thoughts, activities, and by extension their own education and learning. Parents thus abdicate their role of authoritarian presence, dictator and teacher, in favour of becoming their children's partner, supporter, helper, and guide. It removes hierarchy from the family unit, and replaces it with mutual co-operation.

Anarchism is the belief that individuals are fully capable of being self-governing, so do not need to be ruled, controlled, or governed. Taken from An Anarchist FAQ "anarchism is a political theory which aims to create a society within which individuals freely co-operate together as

equals. As such anarchism opposes all forms of hierarchical control as harmful to the individual and their individuality as well as unnecessary.”

So to me, unschooling is basically putting anarchy into practice in daily life. It’s going past the philosophy and the can-it-really-work and proving that people, even children, are far more capable of controlling their own lives than anyone gives them (us) credit for.

Yes, I most definitely realize that unschoolers are not all anarchists. Most aren’t (though there are definitely more anarchists in your average group of unschoolers than you’d find in your average group of random people). I just find that, from my point of view, the two philosophies are extremely complementary. Both emphasize living in co-operation, living in freedom. Both involve a lack of dependence on the State or other higher authorities.

At their core, what both unschooling and anarchy mean to me is living in (when possible), and striving for (when necessary), true freedom. If anarchy is getting rid of all forms of domination and oppression, hierarchy and authority, then unschooling, the freeing of children from school and the empowering of children and teens by giving them back their own lives, is an important part in moving toward an anarchist, co-operative society.

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